

Kang Peng
4040 75th Street, 6F
Elmhurst, New York 11373

November 27, 2022

The Honorable William F. Kuntz, II
United States District Judge Eastern District of New York
225 Cadman Plaza East
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Re: Character Reference for Darren Charles Stewart

To The Honorable William F. Kuntz, II:

I would like to offer my understanding and opinion of Mr. Darren C. Stewart. Darren and myself have been knowing each other since 2016. First as friends, and then we started a romantic relationship that remained until 2019. Even though we were not in a relationship anymore, we continued as roommates until the end of 2020, and still friends today. To my mind, Darren is a caring friend, a supportive Office Manager at Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade), and the center of his family and friends in Australia.

Neither of Darren and I were born in the US. We both came from much smaller cities overseas and arrived in New York City to pursue our careers and dreams. My first impression of Darren was outgoing, humorous, and easy to get along with. I am a more introverted person and not always good at social scenes. Sometimes I worry about what other people think of me. So when I first met Darren, I was amazed how he could make new friends easily and always brought laughter to the people around him. I remember four years ago we sat at a packed restaurant in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and met a man who struggled to find a table. Even though he was a stranger, Darren invited him to sit with us without hesitation. We later learned that the man belonged to a local comedy group and because of Darren's generosity and kindness, he invited us to his performance later. It turned out to be a great evening. Darren taught me with his actions that if we are kind to people, we will receive the same positive response even in such a busy city as New York when everyone seems to only care about themselves. He encouraged me to see the best part in everyone, and most important, to see the best part of myself.

Darren cares for his friends, and is always the person his friends turn to if they need help or suggestions. 2022 has been a tough year for me. I was physically assaulted at the subway station in the summer. Because the surveillance camera happened to be not working, the police did not get the footage of the person who assaulted me. Being deeply disappointed, this incident

put me in frustration. Even though he has been in prison, Darren still cared a lot and taught me how to deal with my feelings via emails. He shared with me the method to picture holding the incident that bothers me in my hands. He taught me how to grab it, recognize it, so it can no longer sit in my heart. Finally, I then open my hands again and let it go. This needs practice and one time is not enough. But thanks to Darren, I can start to deal with it, and am looking forward to putting the incident behind. Darren taught me how to be strong, and look after myself during a chaotic time.

I have attended several public events that were held by Darren's office, Austrade, and met his coworkers and supervisors before. I could see that everyone at work loved him, but only until we had to work from home together during the pandemic, I realized how Darren was not only taking care of the facilities of the office, but also worked as a center of the wheel to support his coworkers emotionally, especially in such a tough time. Being working at the same apartment, I could hear him on the calls with his coworkers when they were isolated anxiously from home when little did the world know about the new disease. During the most serious time of quarantine, when his coworkers felt depressed or frustrated, they would turn to Darren, and he would listen to them patiently. It was not necessary for Darren to give suggestions every time, just to be there and listen, the person who called would feel relieved and be able to focus on the work again. It seemed like magic, but I think this quality must have come from his 20 years long experience being a paramedic saving lives in Australia. Not only once I heard his coworkers telling me how much they appreciated what Darren has done for them.

Even though Darren has been living in New York for years, he still maintains a tight relationship with his son, daughter, ex wife, and the ex wife's family. I was fortunate to meet them during my trip in Australia in 2018 to attend a reunion held by his family for Darren's 50th birthday. His son and daughter were polite, confident, and bright young people in their 20s. I could tell they grew up in a loving and supportive environment. During the days I spent with them, I could see they respected and loved Darren deeply. They asked for his opinions for their careers, life goals, and even relationships. Those bonds, from my opinion, were impossible to develop if the family was toxic or abusive.

His ex wife and her family loved Darren as well, even though they have already separated. The ex wife and her parents gathered together to celebrate Darren's big day and showed that they really missed him. I remember we all sat down at the long table on the porch of the house. A chocolate cake, which was Darren's favorite, was on the table. We sang the happy birthday song and got up to hug each other. In that evening, I saw that in Darren's eyes, he was so proud of his family, and from his family members' faces, I could see his family was proud of him as well.

After Darren turned himself in, the family members and friends in Australia have been reaching out to his lawyers for regular updates and remained in contact with his friends in New York. The family keeps sending pictures and emails to Darren. They are supporting his commissary expenses every month while he was in prison for almost two years. From the conversations I had with his family and friends in Australia, I learned that they all worry about Darren's overall

health, and wish him to go home as soon as it is allowed. Several months ago, his daughter was engaged and still holding the wedding waiting for him to come back so Darren can walk her down the aisle. She also chose to join the medical school so she can follow Darren's path to be a paramedic and help the community.

As I have been in contact with Darren since he is in prison, I know not one day he does not deeply regret. Being separated from his family is the greatest pain he has ever had, and his biggest wish is to be together with them once again. I care for him from the bottom of my heart, and also worried about his well-being in prison. I hope this letter can provide the Darren I know as a person. I would be happy to provide further information if it would be useful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kang Peng', with a stylized, cursive script.

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